

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 30, 1889, with transcript

Copy of a letter written by A. Graham Bell to Mabel (Hubbard) Bell Twin Oaks, Saturday, Nov. 30th, 1889. My dear May:

You will be glad to hear that Uncle David is much better today. I have just discovered the cause of his great depression of spirits yesterday (Nov. 29th). It was on account of a dream he had some time ago! A very strange dream — which evidently affected him more than he may care to own. He dreamed that he saw his own father and mother, his grandfather and grandmother — and others who have passed away long since. He conversed with them — and evidently — during the dream — thought himself to be one of the departed! He asked his father how his little boy was — who died many years ago — from some accident which affected his spine and made him lame and my grandfather told him “Robbie” (I think that was the name) is all right. He is playing with some other children near here. He is not lame now — he is all right and you will see him presently.” And then who should come along but my cousin Lizzie(!) She seemed much surprised and said “Why — Uncle I am so glad to see you — we didn't expect you till the 29th ”! This doubtless was the reason why poor Uncle David was so melancholy and miserable all yesterday. The dreaded day has passed — and he is in a fair way to recovery again. I spent some time with him in his study — and actually got a laugh out of him! I couldn't get him to touch a cigar though. He has not sufficiently recovered himself to venture on even a “Flor de Moree” of the mildest kind. The keys of the trunks have at last been found — in my pocket and the children are happy.

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Poor little Helen! She has been having quite a time over the word “umbrella” which she has persistently called “umblrella.” Charlie tried to teach her to say it correctly some time

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ago — but utterly failed. Poor Helen was much mortified and asked her papa to write it down for her so that she might study it out by herself. He did so and she carried it off with her — and sat in a chair all by herself with the piece of paper in her hand repeating “umb-rel-la — umb-rel-la — umb-rel-la umblella”. She took the paper to bed with her and the little voice was heard in the night practicing umbrel-la. Charlie was quite touched by her perseverance and promised her five cents when she could say the word correctly. Next morning she came to her father in triumph — she had taught herself to say it correctly. “Umbrella — umbrella — umbrella.” Charlie then produced the five cents he had promised her — but to his great surprise Helen burst into tears — and threw her arms round his neck. She didn't want the five cents — she only wanted to please him and say “umbrella.” Her little feelings were actually hurt by the offer of the money. She pushed it aside and would not take it — and would not be pacified until Charlie put the money back in his pocket.

The more I see of Helen the more I admire her sweet spirit and pure heart. I don't know how it is but I used to have the idea that she was a peevish and irritable little thing and generally — “a spoiled child” — but I don't think so now. The trouble when she was a baby — was simply — that she was ill — and any child in poor health is apt to be irritable. As she develops I recognize what a lovely little thing she is morally — I hope she will grow up so. If 3 it is true — and I do not doubt it — that “the child is the father of the man” — then little Helen will prove to be the mother of a beautiful and true woman.

We had some music today and Gipsy played with me — and sang some songs with a beautiful voice — and natural expression. She has a wonderful ear for music for so young a child — a sweet voice — a powerful touch on the keys of the piano and plays and sings with expression. Her whole soul is in it. She will certainly develop into an accomplished musician.

Poor Elsie was much mortified that she had no music at hand that she could sing too — and she was very anxious to try some of Gipay's songs but I persuaded her that it was

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better not to try to sing songs that she knew she could not sing well. Poor little girl — she put her head on my shoulder and the tears would come into her eyes for she wanted to show her grandmama that she could sing well too. I comforted her and told her it would be much better to wait until we could find our music — for — whatever she did for her grandmama I wanted her to do well . I reminded her of her desire to dance the waltz with George Sanders and how she had become convinced that it was much better for her to dance the Polke with him well than to dance the waltz awkwardly. It was pretty hard on her but I think she recognized that it was better not to try to show off at all — than to try and fail as she knew she must fail — in trying a new thing — and that she would please and delight her grandmama much more by singing one of our own songs well.

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She took me off to one side and put her arms round my neck and whispered to me — to know whether I would not take her in to town — and help her to practice a song for grandmama — so I have promised. Daisy has been matronizing Grace and Helen today. Grace and Helen each sat on an arm of a big arm-chair — with Daisy in the middle — while Daisy read to them from a book. We have great cause for thankfulness that we have such good children.

Your loving husband, Alec.